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THE ONE AND THE MANY

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In the suburbs of a large New England city is a flourishing high school. The townspeople are justly proud of their school—its buildings, record, and principal. Ten years ago the principal taught Greek. In that year a class of five elected the course. This class dwindled to three, and the school board ordered the course to be discontinued. Greek has not been taught in that high school since.

The father of one of those three boys was a college professor and a member of the school board. With the principal's help he might have had the course continued, but would not be placed in the position of persisting so largely in his son's interest. He consoled himself with the thought that colleges had beginners' classes in Greek, and the deficiency could there be made up.

But the boy went to a college which had no beginners' class in Greek. After two years of work, successful in all branches, but especially so in Latin, the boy himself felt a vital lack in his education which Greek alone could supply. In this critical situation the father consulted a friend who taught Greek in a neighboring town. As a result, the boy spent his next summer's vacation studying Greek largely by himself, and with the help of good brains and a strong will he passed satisfactorily, in the fall, entrance examinations in Xenophon and Homer. For two years more he studied Greek in college. When he graduated he was rewarded with the highest honor of the class, the Athens fellowship.

Good as his scholarship was, it is certain that in Greek he would have been much better equipped, could he have had the regular high-school course of preparation. In the honor which he finally achieved, as far as Greek went, his own high school could claim no share.

Why should any school, in its zeal for the interests of the many, so neglect the highest interest of the few? Surely a brief statement of reasons for including Greek in the public high-school course is timely.

When all colleges demanded Greek for the A.B. degree, Greek was given generally in private schools and in public high schools. Now that most colleges no longer require Greek for any degree, the center of demand has been shifted from the college to the school and local community. Private schools are fostering the demand more or less. Public schools have largely dropped Greek altogether. Those that still keep it are generally teaching small classes.

The reasons why public high schools are largely dropping Greek are given with almost brutal frankness in this sentence from the report of two college professors, a report which stopped the study of Greek in the high school of one of the large manufacturing cities of the eastern states: "As Greek is no longer required for entrance to college, its teaching should be discontinued in public high schools, and the money and energy which is spent upon it should go into subjects for which there is a more general demand." To these three reasons, first, that Greek is not required for college, second, that there is not enough public demand, and third, that the comparative cost in money and energy is too large, is sometimes added this fourth, that the results, judged by progress toward the goal, are generally unsatisfactory.

It is obvious, then, that, if Greek is to be even partially reinstated in the public high schools, local communities and school authorities must be convinced that it fills a need which should be satisfied, and that it can be taught so as to satisfy that need. Here is our task; how are we to meet it?

Why should Greek be offered in the public high schools? Perhaps the best argument for the case is found in the reasons published some years ago as those of the headmaster of Harrow for discontinuing the study. The knowledge of Greek, he claimed, is a most precious intellectual possession. Nothing can quite replace it as a vehicle for creating accuracy and refinement of

thought; for filling the mind with high literary ideals. The ability to read and enjoy Homer and Plato enormously increases the happiness of life. But it is common knowledge that the vast majority of boys who learn Greek at school do not learn enough to enjoy or even to read the great masterpieces of Greek literature. If they did, no sacrifice would be too great to make in order to retain Greek. As they do not, Greek should be struck from the ordinary curriculum of public schools; and that, too, although it is his conviction, after forty years of experience as a schoolmaster, "that the study of Greek, when pursued far enough to appreciate the literature, is the most elevating of all studies."

Surely this is very valuable expert testimony. The study of Greek, carried to its proper limit, is worth any sacrifice, and is the most valuable of all studies. What more does the fondest enthusiast claim? But as to the conclusion that because the goal is too seldom reached, the public-school boy and girl must be debarred the opportunity—how unheroic, how undemocratic! Even if results are as bad as claimed, may we not still bid our pupils "hitch their wagons to the stars" while we improve our methods of approach?

But while we can improve, and constantly are improving, our methods, of which more, later, there is abundant evidence that, as it is, the results won by Greek teachers bear favorable comparison with those shown in any other department of study. No valid objection to the study of Greek in public schools can be maintained on the ground of unsatisfactory teaching. On the other hand, the charge is sound that those responsible for dropping Greek from the public high schools, unconscious though they be, are really traitors to the soul of democracy in her very temple.

For what does democracy in education mean if not that every boy and girl shall have the opportunity to pursue that course of study which shall best equip him or her for the highest service of which he or she is capable? There is no conflict of opinion among those whose experience qualifies them to judge as to the unique benefit derived from Greek by those whose natural endowment lets them reap the proper fruit from the study. In every community there are such boys and girls, and these are by no

means confined to well-to-do, cultured, or native families. Are such children to be debarred from their best intellectual or spiritual food because they are few and cannot afford the expense of out-of-town or private schools where Greek is taught? Is it not possible to make our local communities see that it is a failure in democracy not to furnish their best brains with the best food, regardless of expense?

It might be assumed that members of classical associations, thereby committed to the cause of Greek, would concede the soundness of this demand on the principles of democracy, but that it would be hard to get the backing of other educational leaders. Instructive in this connection are the results of a questionnaire recently completed by the New England Classical Association. A set of questions was sent to New England Latin teachers, and a similar set over a broader field to college presidents, school superintendents, and instructors in pedagogy and educational psychology, whom, for brevity, we will call specialists in education. Among other questions the specialists were asked whether, in their opinion, Greek should be taught in public high schools; the Latin teachers were asked whether they would co-operate in creating or increasing a demand for Greek. Less than a third of the Latin teachers who answered were willing to do anything toward promoting the study of Greek. The reports of some of the willing ones are illuminating. "The sentiment of the city is strongly against Greek. It was a struggle to keep it up as long as I did," writes one. "Although I am willing to co-operate in creating a demand for the study of Greek, my actions are governed by officials who are averse to the humanities," writes another. "It seem to me if I did [so co-operate] I should be working against the policy of the school," writes a third. Thus a kind of loyalty shackles these friends. Then some of the only teachers of classics in the different schools frankly admit that they know no Greek and do not care to help. A cheering contrast is furnished by the answers of the specialists. Of the 143 answers received from these, 73 were favorable. That over 50 per cent of these influential specialists in education desire to keep Greek in the high-school course because of needs which it best supplies and because of a

belief that every boy and girl who wants to study Greek should have the opportunity is more than encouraging. It suggests that one of our first steps should be to accept the invitation made by one of these specialists, "that the classicists should join hands with the educational psychologists."

We have, then, powerful allies outside our special field ready to help us convince our local communities that the study of Greek in public high schools fills a need which should be satisfied. We have, too, arguments from experience to present to the hard-headed business men who demand proof that Greek is "practical" from their point of view. One school, for instance, has come through experience to require Greek from all its pupils, not strictly scientific, whose first year in Latin has been successful for reasons similar to those for which it encourages football. It knows no sport like football to teach a boy not to flinch; Greek, on the mental side, best fills this bill. It was found that boys avoided the study because it was hard. To give way on that ground was a weakening of moral fiber. To master Greek requires accurate thought and fearless attack of a hard task. The two qualities next to integrity that a business man most desires in his employee are accuracy and no fear of a hard job. If "practical" properly signifies, as Sill says, "effectual in attaining one's end," there is no more "practical" study than Greek for fitting a youth for business life.

But even with the help of our allies we are not going to succeed soon in reinstating Greek in the public schools—and perhaps fortunately—till we teachers of Greek have learned more thoroughly the lesson from our defeats. There is no question, and never has been, of the supremacy of Greek. But no one knows better than the teachers of Greek themselves how far below their aims they have fallen in teaching their pupils to read Greek masterpieces with enjoyment. Little real comfort we get from the consciousness "how far high failure overleaps the bounds of low successes." We can and must teach Greek better. "The real problem," writes one college president, "is not whether education will always deal with the humanities; it always has, and it always will. The real question is whether the classics shall be taught as

a humanity. They have, unfortunately, in some cases strayed a long way from it."

We need not here take the time to look back in the past for reasons why we have not succeeded better. More cheering and more helpful is the forward look from present evidences of progress. First among the promising portents note the comprehensive examination of the College Entrance Board. Though still somewhat shackled by tradition, it tells the secondary school teachers that they can at last fearlessly teach their pupils in their own way to read Greek. If their pupils can show the power to read intelligently easy Greek prose and passages from Homer of only ordinary difficulty, they need have no fear of results, even though they can not reproduce Greek forms to the satisfaction of Greek scholars. This is as it should be, and, properly treated, implies no lowering of the bars of scholarship, merely a transfer of emphasis in the earlier stages of the study. Our one aim is to get our pupils to read Greek masterpieces with appreciation. This can only be when they read them understandingly in the Greek. Translation is only a step toward this goal. Preparation for the comprehensive examination makes it easier for the secondary-school teachers to keep the one aim always in sight than it was when they were compelled to prepare for separate examinations in Greek grammar and composition.

The second sign of progress is found in recent beginners' books. Not only is there improvement in the books following the traditional methods; any teacher who has familiarized himself at all with Rouse's work, no matter what he thinks of the so-called "direct method," must have been helped in his own teaching. Those who have used the still more recent *First Year of Greek* by Allen, a book intended for college beginners, must have glimpsed the possibility of better results in secondary-school work when the proper textbook for younger beginners along similar lines has appeared. As it is, we Greek teachers have no excuse today for not meeting the plea of one of our allies, springing from his own experience, that the teaching of the classics be made less fragmentary than in the past, that pupils may realize that Greek and Latin authors may be read for pleasure.

Greatest of all our allies in inciting young America to the study of Greek is the spirit of America and the allies in the recent war, a spirit one with the Greek at its best. It is the spirit of Marathon and Thermopylae in fighting to the end for the freedom of the small state from foreign despotism. It is the glad spirit of the Greeks with Xenophon, who abode by their oaths, and hence knew that the gods were their allies against a perjured foe. It is the spirit of heroism in staking all for the best. It blossoms in this voice from the trenches: "Until I became a part of the war, I was a doubter of nobility in others and a sceptic as regards myself. The growth of my personal vision was complete when I recognized that the capacity of heroism is latent in everybody, and only awaits the bigness of the opportunity to call it out."

"The bigness of the opportunity!" And we are told that Greek, conquered, is worth any sacrifice and is the most valuable of all studies. If this message could be carried with conviction to the hearts of our boys and girls in the public schools, would not the spirit of the trenches assert itself, and would not their own demand for the opportunity to study Greek become irresistible? And who is so fit to carry the message as the classical teachers in charge of their first-year Latin? If these teachers fail in their opportunity, then indeed the state of Denmark needs a doctor's care.

Another set of allies is suggested by an answer given by a Latin teacher to the question, "Is there a demand for the study of Greek in the school today?" "Not a conscious one," she wrote. "There is an interest in Greek coming from the study of Greek history." This answer is in accord with the following recent experience in a private school. Owing to the enforced absence of the teacher of history, it became necessary for the Greek teacher to complete the course in Greek history with a class of young boys who would normally begin Greek the following year. Bury's smaller history was the textbook. In explaining the phrase "Zeus Soter," the word *ἱεθς* was given the class in Greek letters. The next day pictures of fish with titles in Greek capitals adorned blackboards of the school. For the maxim, "Nothing to excess," the class was again given the Greek in

Greek letters; and when Socrates and the Delphic oracle was reached *γνώθι σεαυτόν* was served them in the Greek. In their next test the class was asked to explain the connection of these three Greek expressions with history. All answers were satisfactory, except that one small boy spelled "know thyself" *no thiself*. This class finished Bury's history at the end of the winter term. By unanimous vote they asked to begin their Greek with the spring term. Their request was granted, with highly gratifying results.

It would be an enormous help to the cause of the classics if all teachers of first-year Latin were also enthusiastic Greek students who could and would present the case of Greek to their promising pupils. It would also be a gain if pupils studied Greek history during their first year in high school under enthusiastic teachers of Greek. The colleges can do no better service to the classics than to send out to every community such Hellenists as teachers of Latin and of ancient history.

As a closing offering, hear these two cheering messages from our allies, which are at the same time challenges to action. The first was given recently in a personal interview by a state secretary of education. "I greatly deplore," he said, "the loss of contact of the United States of America with Greek culture: The whole essence of democracy is opportunity, and the whole essence of opportunity for a pupil is to fulfill his God-given bent. If this leads to Greek culture, he has an indefeasible right to his opportunity there." The second is an answer given in the above mentioned questionnaire by the principal of a state normal school. "I favor the teaching of Greek in secondary schools," he writes, "if there is one pupil who wishes to study it. It is likely to be someone who is worth helping."